

# COVID-19

## How to keep safe during your cancer treatment

Information for patients



Leeds Cancer  
Centre

COVID-19 is a new infectious disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2 and currently causing a worldwide pandemic.

As we discover more about this, it is clear that people may experience only mild symptoms (or even no symptoms) and may not require admission to hospital.

*However, some people with certain risk factors are more likely to develop a serious illness, including:*

- Men
- People from black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups
- People aged 60 years and older
- Those with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity
- People diagnosed with cancer

This makes our patient group at Leeds Cancer Centre particularly vulnerable. We are doing everything we can to protect you, and we need you to help us keep you, and our hospital, safe.

## What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

*People with COVID-19 may have one of the following symptoms:*

- A high temperature over 37.8°C
- A new, continuous cough – if you usually have a cough it may be worse than normal
- A loss or change to your sense of smell or taste

If you develop any of these symptoms, get a test and do not leave home for at least 10 days.

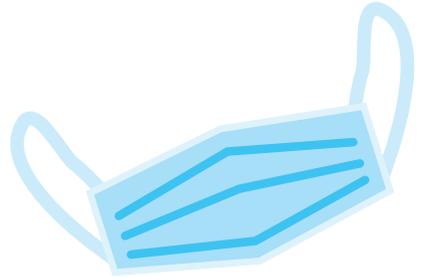
There are other less specific symptoms of COVID-19 (listed below) that some people may experience. You may already have some of these symptoms related to your diagnosis or treatment, and so you should pay attention to them if they are worse than normal, or new for you.

- Aches and pains
- Tiredness
- Sore throat
- Diarrhoea
- Headache
- A skin rash or discoloration of fingers or toes



**Some people that are potentially infectious have no symptoms at all.**

## Top tips for wearing facemasks



- Beware of sore or red patches on the bridge of your nose or strap contact points behind the ears.
- Keep hydrated.
- You may want to apply lip balm and/or moisturiser to your face and ears.
- If you have a medical condition which affects your ability to wear a facemask, discuss with your team at Leeds Cancer Centre.

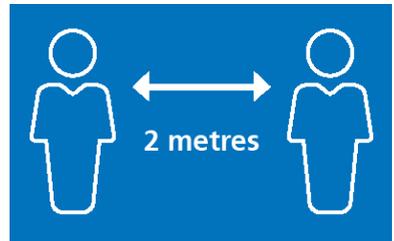
## Safe use of non-clinical facemasks

- Before putting a mask on, clean your hands with soap and water, or alcohol hand sanitiser.
- Pinch the metal band to mould the mask over your nose, tie it over your head/loop it around your ears and pull it down under the chin. If the mask has a coloured side, make sure this is on the outside.
- Try not to touch the mask. If you do touch it, disinfect your hands with soap and water or alcohol hand sanitiser.
- When removing the mask, it should be handled by the straps only and placed straight into a waste bin with yellow and black bags. You should decontaminate your hands with soap and water or an alcohol hand sanitiser.

# What can you do to reduce your risk of catching COVID-19?

*There are some simple measures you can take to prevent catching COVID-19*

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or clean them using an alcohol hand sanitiser if soap and water is not available. This is particularly important before eating or drinking, as soon as you enter your home after being out, when touching your mask
- Avoid touching your face
- Aim to stay at least 2 metres away from people as much as possible
- Wear a face covering in areas where it is not possible to maintain social distancing recommendations
- Keep indoor spaces well ventilated
- Avoid crowded spaces – especially poorly ventilated indoor crowded spaces
- Work from home if you can
- If you have to travel, think about when and how you can travel
- Avoid face to face contact with people if they are outside your household or support bubble
- If you have a medical condition which affects your ability to wear a facemask, discuss with your team at Leeds Cancer Centre.



## What do we need you to do?

As one of our patients, you are at higher risk of developing a serious illness if you catch COVID-19, if you are currently undergoing treatment. For this reason, we ask you to protect yourself and reduce your risk of being infected by COVID-19 by strictly adhering to our guidelines for patients undergoing treatment, developed from NHS Infection Prevention Guidelines and NICE Guidelines.

### Summary guidance

*All patients must follow comprehensive social distancing and hand hygiene measures at all times. This is particularly important for 14 days immediately before any admission to hospital. In addition, the following infection prevention measures are required:*

All patients are required to have a negative COVID-19 test less than 72 hours before admission.

- All Day-Case Procedures requiring a General Anaesthetic:
- Self-isolation for 14 days prior to admission.
- Entire household encouraged to self-isolate with the patient where possible.

*All patients coming into hospital for treatment as an inpatient. This includes patients having surgery requiring inpatient stay, patients requiring Inpatient Oncology Chemotherapy or with a haematological cancer.*

- Self-isolation for 14 days before admission.
- Entire household encouraged to self-isolate with patient where possible.

***All patients having diagnostic investigations under local anaesthetic or light sedation:***

- Self-isolation following COVID-19 test until admission

***Patients undergoing outpatient chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment***  
***Social distancing and hand hygiene at all times***

- Regular asymptomatic COVID-19 screening programme – your team will inform you of details.
- Your clinical team will advise you which of these four categories you fall into.

**If you are exposed to COVID-19 or think that you are symptomatic you must inform your team.**

If you are uncertain if you should be following self-isolating guidelines, please contact your team at Leeds Cancer Centre.

## **What should you do after you leave hospital if you have had a surgery or a diagnostic procedure?**

If you get coronavirus infection in the period soon after surgery or procedure, you could become seriously ill and may need to be readmitted to hospital. To avoid catching the virus after surgery, it is vital that you self-isolate after your surgery or procedure. Depending on the nature of your procedure and recovery your consultant or care team may advise you to continue to self-isolate after leaving hospital. This may vary depending on the nature of surgery or type of procedure and can range from seven days for day case surgical or interventional radiological procedures to 14 days for major surgery from the time of discharge.

This additional period of self-isolation is a precaution as your immune system will be working hard to help your body to recover from the surgery and/or procedure you have had.

## What does “social distancing” actually mean?

Social distancing means avoiding close contact with people and is a way to protect yourself and reduce your risk of catching COVID-19 without having to stay at home the entire time.

*The government has given the following recommendations to guide people about social distancing:*

- Stay at home as much as possible
- Continue to work from home if possible to avoid unnecessary social contacts
- Limit contact with other people
- Keep a safe distance from other people if you go out
- Wash your hands regularly
- Wear a face covering in all indoor public places unless eating (eg shops, public transport)
- Shop safely – avoid busy times, wear face coverings, avoid touching objects you are not buying, maintain your distance from other shoppers, use contactless payment if possible
- Exercise safely – avoid busy areas, stay outdoors, maintain your distance from others
- Travel safely – see further guidance below
- Do not leave your home if you or a household member has symptoms of COVID-19.

- Do not have visitors inside your household that are not part of your “bubble” in the 14 days leading up to any hospital admissions.

## What does “self-isolation” actually mean?

When you “self-isolate” before you are admitted to hospital this means you should stay at home as much as possible to avoid exposure to COVID-19. Whilst the Government guidance is for those that are infected with COVID-19, the emphasis for you is to protect you from catching the illness just before admission to hospital.

### *From a practical perspective this means:*

- Do not go to work
- Do not go to school
- Do not go on public transport
- Do not go to shops for food or medicine – order online or by phone, or ask someone to bring it to your home
- Do not have visitors to your home – this includes friends and family except those helping with essential care.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently for at least 20 seconds.
- Any exercise should be taken within your home or garden.
- If you have to leave your house for any reason wash your hands as soon as you return and wear a mask in indoor public places eg shops.
- When food, medication, or other supplies are delivered to your house they should be left at the door to minimise contact.

- Make sure anyone that has to come to your house (eg for essential care) washes their hands as soon as they arrive for 20 seconds.
- Clean surfaces you touch frequently (eg door handles, phones) with sanitising cleaning products.
- Clean any shared bathrooms each time you use them by wiping surfaces you have touched.

### **How do I self-isolate if I live with other people?**

*If you live with other people – family members or friends – you have two choices:*

- Self-isolate with your entire household or
- Self-isolate within your household.

### **How do I self-isolate with my entire household?**

This is usually regarded as the easiest method of self-isolation if it is practical for your personal circumstances.

You can interact with members of your household group normally, but the whole household must adhere to the self-isolation guidelines described above, for the length of time recommended. This includes children within the household.

If any member of the household has any symptoms of COVID-19 during this period you must inform your team. Your procedure or treatment will need to be postponed for your own safety.

### **How do I self-isolate within my household?**

If it is not possible for your whole household to self-isolate with you (eg. family members leaving the house for essential work or children attending school) then you need to take

steps to isolate yourself from members of your household whilst remaining in the same residence. The other members of your household should minimise contact with people outside your bubble where possible.

*The following are steps to consider to help you avoid non-essential contact with household members:*

- Minimise time spent in shared spaces (eg kitchens) and keep these areas well ventilated by opening windows and doors where appropriate.
- Keep more than two metres apart as much as possible
- Sleep in a different room where possible
- Consider using a face covering in shared spaces
- If possible, use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household, and use separate towels to other family members – bath towels and hand towels.
- If you share a bathroom with others all surfaces should be wiped every time anyone uses it, and whenever possible you should be the first person to use the facilities – eg the first person to have a bath.
- Avoid using the kitchen at the same time as others and think about eating your meals in your own room.
- When possible use a dishwasher to clean utensils and use a separate tea towel if drying equipment.
- Continue to wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face.

Despite isolating yourself, if any members of the household have symptoms of COVID-19 during this period you must inform your team for your own safety as there is still a risk you may catch the infection.

**If you are concerned about your ability to self-isolate within your household please speak to your clinical team.**

## **How should I travel to hospital?**

Whenever possible you should avoid using public transport to visit the hospital – this is the least safe method of transport.

It is safest to travel in a car with members of your household or “bubble”

***If you have to use a taxi or other private car, and have no safer alternative, then:***

- Open the windows for ventilation
- Ask the driver and any other passengers to wear a face covering
- Wear a face covering
- Touch as few surfaces as possible
- Wash or sanitise your hands as soon as possible at the end of the journey

***If you have to use public transport:***

- Keep your distance from other passengers whenever possible
- Avoid the busiest routes, and avoid busy times such as rush-hour if possible
- Wash or sanitise your hands regularly
- Wear a face covering
- Avoid touching your face



- Travel side-by-side or behind other passengers, rather than facing them
- Touch as few surfaces as possible
- Stay outdoors rather than indoors where possible (eg waiting at a train station)
- Minimise the time spent close to people
- Avoid people that are talking loudly, shouting, or singing
- Wash or sanitise your hands as soon as possible at the end of the journey

**Please contact us if you have concerns about how to travel so we can discuss the options with you.**

## **What are we doing for you?**

**Before you come to the hospital we will call or text** you to check whether you or any household members have symptoms of COVID-19. Please remember the importance of telling us of any contact you have had with infected people as this information could prevent you from having a serious, life threatening infection. We can change outpatient appointments to telephone or virtual appointments, and we can rearrange your surgery to the earliest possible safe timeframe if required.

**Please do not come to hospital if you, or anyone you have come into contact with in the last 14 days has symptoms of COVID-19. This includes those people that may have been told been told by “NHS test and trace” to isolate.**

**Some patients will have a COVID-19 swab from their throat and nose within 72 hours of coming to hospital** (see summary guidance above). For those patients we need to see a negative swab result before your treatment can proceed – this is based on guidance from NHS England. In very exceptional circumstances we may perform your procedure without this result, but this would only be following a discussion with your team about specific risks.

**When you arrive at the hospital, even if you are already wearing a face covering, we will ask you to change this to a medical grade surgical face mask** that we will provide, unless you are exempt for medical reasons. You will notice that we expect all members of staff and patients to wear a face covering to protect everyone

**When you arrive at the hospital you will be asked to remove any gloves you may be wearing.** The reason for removing gloves is to prevent any infection you may have picked up on the gloves being transferred onto hospital surfaces that you touch. This will protect you, other patients, and staff members. We will ask you to use alcohol hand rub frequently, and you will find hand sanitiser in various forms throughout the hospital. These are themselves cleaned regularly, but whilst many are not a “non-touch” variety the act of rubbing your hands with the sanitiser will remove any perceived risk from this.

**You will have your temperature checked** and will be asked about whether you have any symptoms of COVID-19 as you arrive in the hospital, in addition to being questioned before coming to hospital. This is in line with NHS England guidance. You will then be given a sticker to confirm this process. It is possible that despite this you may be asked about COVID-19 symptoms at other timepoints. We will try to minimise this where possible. Whilst this might become repetitive please understand that this is another measure to protect everyone.

**We have rapidly rolled out a staff vaccination programme** and by the second week in January 2021 all of the staff at Leeds Cancer Centre will have been offered vaccination against the COVID-19 virus. This will help to protect you when you come to hospital. Despite this it is very important that all staff members and patients adhere to our measures described below to minimise spread of infection and maintain a safe environment.

**Visiting inpatients and accompanying patients** to appointments or daycare remains suspended unless in exceptional circumstances. Please speak to a member of your team if you have any concerns or worries about this, or would like further information.

**Our catering facilities for outpatients are severely limited** at present. Whilst we hope to resume some provision of food in the outpatient areas this service may be unpredictable, and we recommend bringing a drink and some food with you to any outpatient appointments. We apologise for this inconvenience.

**Social distancing within the hospital** – you will notice that there are stickers on the floor reminding everyone to maintain a distance wherever possible. We have also removed chairs in waiting areas, and from the canteen to help maintain a distance in areas where people would normally congregate.

**Cleaning** – our cleaning staff have played a vital role in keeping you safe. You will notice that all areas are cleaned more frequently, “high touch” surfaces such as door handles and arms of chairs are being wiped down between patients in clinic rooms and examination areas, and there are strict protocols in place for “deep cleaning” whenever required.

## What can I do to keep myself healthy and prepare for treatment?

There are steps you can take to help improve your fitness before surgery to minimise complications and risks during the peri-operative period and speed up your recovery and discharge from hospital. This is called "prehabilitation". The advice we give is simple generic advice that applies to every patient undergoing any form of treatment - whether they are having surgery or medical treatment.

Evidence is emerging that patients with better levels of health and fitness may develop milder symptoms from COVID-19 and may recover faster. Therefore, our simple prehabilitation advice now applies to everybody. The simple steps are outlined below.

**Exercise** – you should aim to exercise every day. This could be anything such as brisk walking or cycling. If you are staying inside you could consider exercise videos or simply walking briskly around your home. Anything that gets you slightly out of breath will increase your fitness. If you have any concerns about getting fit, such as other health conditions impacting on your ability to be active, your team can refer you to the physiotherapy team.

**Strengthening exercises** – in addition to exercise that gets you out of breath, exercises to strengthen your muscles will help you to recover from your treatment faster. Examples of strengthening exercises include lifting hand weights or carrying heavy bags, using resistance bands, climbing the stairs, or practicing sitting to standing repeatedly.

For resources, advice, and links to strengthening ideas please see the NHS pages [www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/how-to-improve-strength-flexibility](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/how-to-improve-strength-flexibility).

**Nutrition** – eating a healthy diet will help to boost your immune system. Your team will contact the dietitians if there are any specific concerns about your nutritional status.

**Psychological wellbeing** – during these stressful times it is important to look after your mental wellbeing. Some activities may be a distraction or help you to feel good. It is important to do some of these each day – such as making a meal or participating in a craft or hobby. Maintaining relationships with friends and family is also important but can be overwhelming if they have lots of questions. Planning your telephone or video calls is encouraged so they are spaced out. Try to get a good night's sleep and explore relaxation techniques such as listening to relaxing music, breathing techniques, and mindfulness techniques. Speak to your team if you need further help or advice regarding psychological wellbeing.

**Smoking and alcohol** – stopping smoking will help you if you were to contract Coronavirus. You should also try to remain within recommended limits of alcohol consumption with some alcohol-free days to improve your wellbeing. Let your team know if you would like more advice to reduce your smoking or alcohol intake.

**Start your own urgent care plan** - you can start your own urgent care plan. This way you can tell us what is important to you in an emergency. Whilst you are in hospital we will complete your plan so when you go home, your GP and all the urgent care services will know what care you have received and how to look after you in the future.

## Local support services

### Leeds Cancer Support

Leeds Cancer Support complements care provided by your clinical team. We offer access to information and a wide range of support, in a welcoming environment for you, your family and friends.

We can be found in the information lounges in Bexley Wing and also in the purpose built Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre.

### The Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre

The Centre is on the St James's Hospital site and offers a variety of support services including complementary and supportive therapies. These therapies include Reiki, relaxation and visualisation, hand and foot massage and many others. We also offer a weekly exercise class and a monthly support group. You can just drop in for a coffee and a chat anytime.

### Contact numbers for Leeds Cancer Support

#### *Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre*

Open from 10.00am - 4.00pm. Tel: **(0113) 206 6498**

#### *Information Lounge Level -2 Radiotherapy Department*

Open from 8.00am - 6.00pm Tel: **(0113) 206 7603**

#### *Information Centre Level 1 Outpatients Department*

Open from 9.00am - 4.00pm. Tel: **(0113) 206 8816**

*All the above services can be emailed on:*

**leedsth-tr.cancersupport@nhs.net**

## Maggie's Centre

If you or someone you love has cancer you may have lots of questions. Maggie's is a warm, welcoming place where you can meet people who are experiencing similar things to you. You don't need an appointment and all support is free. Open Monday to Friday 9.00 am - 5.00pm. **Tel: 0113 427 8364**

**Address:** St James's Hospital (next to the multi-storey car park), Alma Street, Leeds LS9 7BE

Email: [leeds@maggiescentres.org](mailto:leeds@maggiescentres.org) [www.maggiescentres.org](http://www.maggiescentres.org)

## National support organisations

**Macmillan Cancer Support** [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

Freephone: **0808 808 0000**, 8am to 8pm seven days a week.

A textphone service for deaf and hard of hearing people on **18001 0808 808 0000**

*This patient leaflet has been adapted from The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust COVID-19 self-isolation guidance booklet*



## What did you think of your care?

Scan the QR code or visit [bit.ly/nhsleedsfft](https://bit.ly/nhsleedsfft)

*Your views matter*



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